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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

Before the FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION Washington, D.C. 20554

In the Matter of)	
Tariff Filing Requirements for Nondominant Common Carriers)	CC Docket No. 93-36

REPLY COMMENTS OF AMERICAN TELEPHONE AND TELEGRAPH COMPANY

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April 19, 1993

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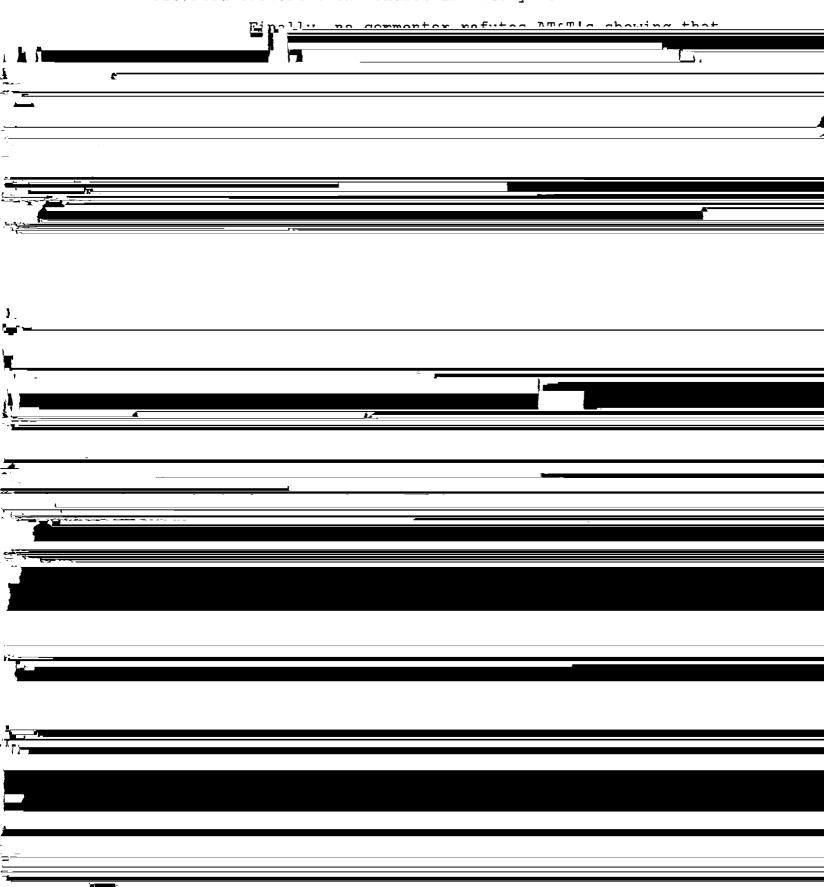
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SUMMARY

The comments of those who support the Commission's proposal to permit the filing of only "ranges" of rates or "maximum" rates do not refute AT&T's showing that this proposal is the practical equivalent of forbearance, and would effectively nullify the mandatory requirements of Section 203 of the Communications Act. Indeed, Sprint (p.8) admits that the proposal would "continue the Commission's existing practice" of allowing nondominant carriers to provide service at unified rates pursuant to secret agreements. Contrary to the arguments of these commenters, however, neither the Commission's "discretion" under Section 4(i) nor its "limited" modification authority under Section 203(b) permit such conduct. Indeed, this conclusion is not merely required by the unequivocal language of the statute, it is precisely the holding of controlling Supreme Court and appellate decisions.

There is likewise no basis for the claims of some commenters that provisions of the Act other than Section 203 authorize the filing of maximum rates or ranges of rates with no other information, and that the courts have approved such filings. That is incorrect. What courts have held is that ranges of rates are permissible only if the method of calculating actual rates within the range is disclosed in the carrier's filing. The commenters cite no court or agency decision that departs from this standard, which

ensures the availability of carriers' offerings to similarly situated customers on nondiscriminatory terms.



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In the Matter of) OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

Tariff Filing Requirements for) CC Docket No. 93-36

REPLY COMMENTS OF AMERICAN TELEPHONE AND TELEGRAPH COMPANY

Nondominant Common Carriers

American Telephone and Telegraph Company ("AT&T") hereby submits its reply comments on the Notice of Proposed Rulemaking in CC Docket No. 93-36 ("Notice"), released February 19, 1993.1

AT&T certainly shares concerns about the interference of unnecessary regulatory requirements with the operation of competitive market forces, and fully supports the Commission's efforts to eliminate or reduce regulatory requirements when consistent with the terms of the Communications Act. The principal point of contention in this proceeding, however, is the lawfulness of the Commission's proposal to permit "nondominant" carriers to file tariffs containing only "ranges" of rates or "maximum"

Tariff Filing Requirements for Nondominant Common Carriers, CC Docket No. 93-36, FCC 93-103, released February 19, 1993. A list of other parties submitting comments in this proceeding, and the abbreviated designations used herein, is attached as Appendix A.

rates, but that do not specify the actual charges to customers or the formula for determining those charges.

Section 203 of the Communications Act explicitly and unequivocally requires common carriers to file with the Commission and publish schedules showing "all" of their charges, and "all classifications, regulations and practices affecting" their charges (47 U.S.C. § 203(a)), and prohibits carriers from charging and collecting rates different than those "specified" in their schedules (47 U.S.C. § 203(c)).2 Far from being "unnecessary," as the Notice suggests (para. 12), these filed rate requirements are "utterly central to the administration" of the Act, and are essential to implementation of the requirement of Section 202(a) that a carrier's offerings be made available to similarly situated customers. The Commission's proposal would effectively nullify the Act's filing requirements, "sanction adherence to unfiled rates, [and] undermin[e] the basic structure of the Act."4 It is, therefore, unlawful. Any

See AT&T v. FCC, 978 F.2d 727 (D.C. Cir. 1992) ("AT&T v. FCC"); MCI v. FCC, 765 F.2d 1186 (1985).

Maislin Industries, U.S. Inc. v. Primary Steel, Inc., 497 U.S. 116, 132 (1990) ("Maislin") (citation omitted); see also AT&T v. FCC, 978 F.2d at 736 n.12;; Regular Common Carrier Conference v. United States, 793 F.2d 376, 379 (D.C. Cir. 1986) ("Regular Common Carrier Conference"); Sea-Land Service, Inc. v. ICC, 738 F.2d 1311, 1316-18 (D.C. Cir. 1984) ("Sea-Land"); ABC v. FCC,, 643 F.2d 818, 822-24 (D.C. Cir. 1980).

⁴ Maislin, 497 U.S. at 132.

contrary view is foreclosed by the decisions of the Court of Appeals in AT&T v. FCC, MCI v. FCC and Regular Common

Carrier Conference, and of the Supreme Court in Maislin.

I. THE COMMISSION'S PROPOSAL TO PERMIT CARRIERS TO FILE ONLY RANGES OF RATES OR MAXIMUM RATES EFFECTIVELY DISPENSES WITH THE FILED RATE REQUIREMENTS OF THE COMMUNICATIONS ACT, AND, ACCORDINGLY, EXCEEDS THE COMMISSION'S AUTHORITY.

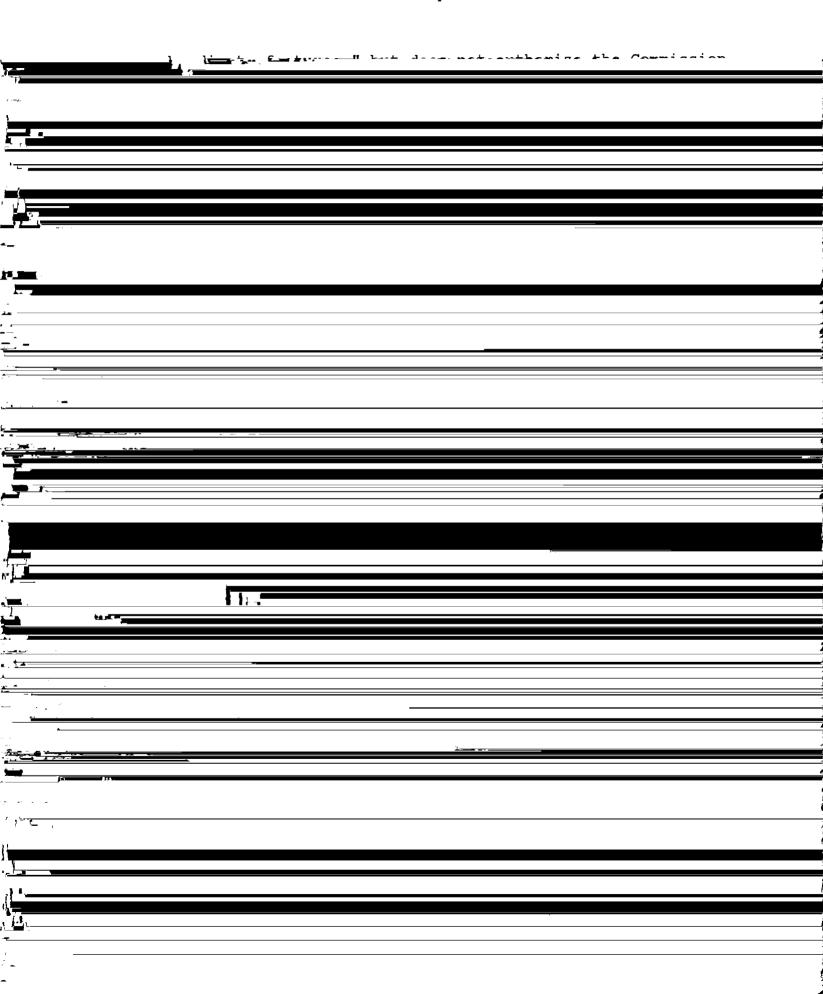
Those commenters that support the Commission's proposal argue that it is permissible under

Section 203(b)(2) of the Act, that other provisions of the Act authorize ranges of rates, that the courts have approved range tariffs, and that, in all events, the proposal is warranted by the Commission's finding that nondominant carriers lack market power, and other policy findings. Many of these arguments were the same ones asserted in support of forbearance, and that have been repeatedly rejected by the courts. They are no more compelling here.

In particular, the courts have held that the Commission's authority under Section 203(b)(2) is "limited." 5 That section permits changes to "incidental or

(footnote continued on following page)

AT&T v. FCC, 978 F.2d at 736. The Court noted that the Second Circuit's interpretation of the FCC's authority under Section 203(b) is "similarly restricted." Id. at 736 n.12, citing AT&T v. FCC, 487 F.2d 865 (2d Cir. 1973). The Second Circuit's statement that Section 203(b) permits the Commission to "modify requirements as to the form of and information contained in" tariffs (id. at 879) provides no support for the Commission's proposal, as some commenters (e.g., MCI, p. 13) suggest. In addition to requiring the filing of rates, Section 203(a) authorizes the Commission to require the filing of "other information." 47 U.S.C.



Section 205 of the Act likewise provides no support for the Commission's proposal, as some commenters suggest. Palthough Section 205 authorizes the Commission to prescribe maximum and minimum rates, nothing in that section or cases thereunder suggest that the Commission may thereby relieve carriers from their obligation under Section 203 to file and publish specific rates above the prescribed minimum or below the prescribed maximum. Reading Section 205 to permit what Section 203 explicitly forbids is not merely unreasonable, but irrational.

compTel's observation (p. 11 n.28) that "a range of rates can be found to be 'just and reasonable'" under Section 201(b) misses the point. Ranges of rates are not per se unlawful, but are permissible provided that carriers make a given rate within the range available to similarly situated customers, as required by Section 202(a). This requirement is meaningless unless carriers file specific

⁽footnote continued from previous page)

properly be used . . . to contravene another provision of the Act").

See, e.g., PacTel Paging, p. 11.

See MCI v. FCC, 842 F.2d 1296, 1305-06 (D.C. Cir. 1988) ("[e]ven if one assumes that neither special access nor SNFA charges are unreasonable when viewed independently of one another, it does not follow that SNFA charges are not unreasonably or unjustly low relative to [the] special access tariffs").

rates, 11 or the formula enabling customers to calculate the rates within the range that would apply to different types or volumes of traffic. 12 That is why Section 203 requires the filing of schedules containing "all charges," and "all classifications, practices and regulations affecting such charges. *13

In this regard, Associated Gas Distributors v.

FERC, cited by several commenters in support of the

Commission's proposal (CompTel, p. 10; CTIA, p. 4;

Telocator, p. 8 n.18), actually underscores the proposal's

legal deficiencies. 14 All the Court held was that a rule

adopted by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission ("FERC")

permitting pipelines to establish and initially file minimum

and maximum rates was not per se discriminatory. FERC

recognized, however, that the provision of service at

unfiled rates below the maximum rate would violate the

¹¹ See AT&T Communications, Inc., Tariff F.C.C. No. 15, Holiday Rate Plan, 5 FCC Rcd. 1821 (1990) (finding that MCI offer to Holiday Corporation containing unfiled discounts did not become available to other customers until MCI "made public" the "terms of its offer"). See also AT&T Comments, pp. 11-13.

¹² See, e.g., Regular Common Carrier Conference, 793 F.2d at 380 (tariff that does not disclose the "per unit rate" is unlawful unless it contains provisions disclosing "how the per-unit rate is determined, enabling [customers and competing carriers] to protest the application of a different formula to a particular shipper").

^{13 47} U.S.C. § 203(a). <u>See</u> AT&T Comments, p. 6 n.7.

Associated Gas Distributors v. FERC, 824 F.2d 981 (D.C. Cir. 1987) ("Associated Gas"), cert. denied, 485 U.S. 1006 (1988).

Natural Gas Act's counterpart to Section 203. For this reason, FERC specified in the rule under review that pipelines were required to file any discounts (off the maximum rate) actually provided to customers. 15 Both FERC and the Court concluded that this requirement would ensure the availability of such discounts to similarly situated customers, and thereby comply with the nondiscrimination provisions and filing requirements of the Natural Gas Act. 16 As the Court explained, this "reporting system will enable [FERC] to monitor behavior and to act promptly when it or another party detects behavior arguably falling under the bans of sections 4 and 5 [prohibiting unreasonable discrimination]."17

The Commission's proposal is also invalid under

Maislin, Regular Common Carrier Conference and other

decisions construing the parallel provisions of the

^{15 &}lt;u>See</u> 18 C.F.R. § 284.7(d)(5)(iv).

¹⁶ Order No. 436, 50 Fed. Reg. 42,408, 42,452 (October 18,
1985), citing Sea-Land.

Associated Gas, 824 F.2d at 1009. Decisions both prior and subsequent to Associated Gas under the Natural Gas Act and Federal Power Act have stressed that these statutes, like the Communications Act, require the filing of specific rates. See, e.g., Transwestern Pipeline Co. v. FERC, 897 F.2d 570, 578-79 (D.C. Cir.) (filed "'rate' within meaning of Section 4 or Section 5 of the Natural Gas Act" requires "specific, absolute numbers" or a "tariff containing a rate 'formula' or rate 'rule'"), cert. denied, 498 U.S. 952 (1990); Electrical Dist.

No. 1 v. FERC, 774 F.2d 490, 492-93 (D.C. Cir. 1985) (Scalia, J.) (Federal Power Act "requires the rate itself to be specified").

Interstate Commerce Act ("ICA"), as demonstrated in AT&T's initial comments (pp. 7-9). No commenter refutes this showing, but some contend that decisions under the ICA are not relevant to the construction of the Communications Act. 18 These claims are meritless.

The statutory filing provisions of the ICA are virtually identical to and provided the model for the provisions of Section 203, ¹⁹ and courts construing the Communications Act thus treat decisions construing the parallel provisions of the ICA as "control[ling]."²⁰ The ICC's authority relative to statutory filing requirements, moreover, is identical to the authority granted this Commission. Each may change or modify these requirements in certain respects, but neither agency may exempt a carrier from the basic requirements of filing specific charges and adhering to them.²¹ For these reasons, it could not be

¹⁸ See, e.g., MCI, pp. 15-16; Sprint, p. 6.

Compare 47 U.S.C. § 203(a) and 203(c) with 49 U.S.C. §§ 10762(a)(1) and 10761(a). All of these provisions derive from Section 6 of the original ICA. See 24 Stat. 379, 380-381 (1887); Las Cruces TV Cable v. FCC, 645 F.2d 1041, 1051-52 (D.C. Cir. 1981) ("The Congressional policy against rate discrimination through secret, nontariff arrangements is embodied in [Section 203], which in turn is modeled on Section 6 of the Interstate Commerce Act"), citing S. Rep. No. 781, 73d Cong., 2d Sess. at 4 (1934).

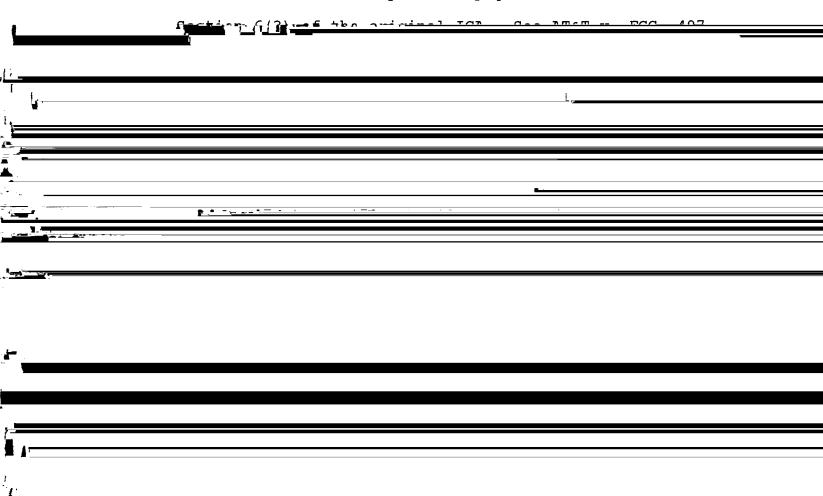
²⁰ ABC v. FCC, 643 F.2d 818, 820-21 (D.C. Cir. 1980); see also AT&T v. FCC, 978 F.2d at 736 n.12; MCI v. FCC, 917 F.2d 30, 38 (D.C. Cir. 1990); AT&T v. FCC, 487 F.2d at 873-74.

²¹ Compare 47 U.S.C. § 203(b)(2) with 49 U.S.C. § 10762(d)(1). Both of these provisions derive from (footnote continued on following page)

clearer that <u>Maislin</u> and <u>Regular Common Carrier Conference</u> are fully applicable to the Communications Act.

Finally, a number of commenters repeat the argument that the Commission's proposal is legally justified by its "policy findings," including its finding that the information required by Section 203 is not necessary to enforce the nondiscrimination provisions of the Act. This same argument was rejected in both MCI v FCC and Maislin. Each case unequivocally holds that only Congress may relieve common carriers from the filing requirements currently embodied in Section 203, regardless of any Commission policy findings. 22 Maislin is likewise dispositive of the

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commenters' claims that rate filing information is not necessary to prevent discrimination. It holds that the negotiation and collection of rates that are lower than the filed rate constitute "the very price discrimination that the Act by its terms seeks to prevent."²³

(footnote continued from previous page)

here reconsider its refusal in Docket 90-132 to authorize nondominant carriers to provide service on a private carriage basis. Ad-Hoc's explanation of the Commission's decision as attributable to "implementation difficulties" and concerns about cross-subsidization that apply only to AT&T (p. 17) is speculative and wrong. The Commission found that "[t]he record {does} not support the adoption of[the] private carriage proposal" as to any carrier. Competition in the Interstate Interexchange Marketplace, 6 FCC Rcd. 5880, 5897 n.150 (1991) ("IXC Rulemaking Order"). Moreover, the Commission made no findings anywhere in the IXC Rulemaking Order that AT&T could cross-subsidize private or common carriage discounts with revenues derived from other offerings, and no such finding is possible given the intense competition that characterizes the interexchange market. In all events, private carriage is outside the scope of this proceeding, which concerns the tariff filing requirements applicable to common carriers.

Maislin, 497 U.S. at 130. Several commenters (e.g., Sprint, pp. 6-7) assert that under forbearance, no formal complaints alleging discrimination were filed by customers against nondominant carriers, and claim that this "fact" constitutes "empirical evidence" that no such discrimination occurred. These claims are nonsense. The absence of formal complaints by customers does not constitute "empirical evidence," but simply validates the court's observation that absent the public filing of

II. THERE IS NO BASIS TO LIMIT TO AT&T'S COMPETITORS THE COMMISSION'S PROPOSALS REGARDING THE FORM OF TARIFFS AND NOTICE PERIODS.

In its comments (pp. 14-19), AT&T demonstrated that the Commission has substantial discretion regarding form of tariffs and notice periods, but that there is no basis to limit the proposals in the Notice addressed to these matters to AT&T's competitors. Significantly, the only customer group to address the applicability of these proposals to AT&T, ITAA (p. 6), agrees that the Commission should "relax[]" the "burdens it imposes on AT&T."

In contrast, MCI states that the one-day notice period proposed by the Commission is "permissible under the statute so long as it does not apply" to AT&T.²⁴ Other AT&T competitors claim that continued asymmetry is warranted by

⁽footnote continued from previous page)

Communications Corp. v. MCI, No. E-91-103, filed June 3, 1991 (allegations by reseller that MCI had violated section 202). Further, Sprint has virtually admitted that it and other nondominant AT&T competitors do not make their off-tariff deals available to resale customers. See US Sprint Petition to Reject, AT&T Communications Transmittal No. 2773, filed December 30, 1990, p. 5 ("resellers . . . are unlikely to have a substantially similar offer from another IXC").

MCI, pp. 2-3 n.3. MCI admits that it opposed reducing the notice period in Docket 90-132, but claims that its opposition was based on AT&T's dominant classification.

Id. This is false. In that Docket, MCI took the position that even for "non-dominant" carriers, reducing the notice period to less than fourteen days would be "inconsistent with the statute" and the Commission's "statutory mandate." MCI Comments, CC Docket No. 90-132, pp. 126-27.

AT&T's "market power" or "dominance." Neither claim has any substance.

By its terms, the Communications Act, including the filing requirements of Section 203, applies to "every" common carrier, and recognizes no distinction between "dominant" and "nondominant" carriers. The Commission's authority to reduce the statutory notice period and adopt (or eliminate) rules governing the form of tariffs likewise applies to all common carriers. The Commission's discretion as to these matters is constrained only by Section 203(b)(2), which requires that there be "good cause" for its actions, and by the Administrative Procedure Act, which prohibits agency action that is arbitrary and capricious.

These provisions clearly permit, indeed require, the application of the Commission's proposals to AT&T. The Notice (e.g., paras. 14-15, 25) tentatively concludes that in view of competition, the Commission's current rules regarding notice periods and the form of tariffs are not necessary to protect customers, and impose substantial costs on customers as well as carriers. The Commission, however, has made virtually identical findings with respect to AT&T's inbound and outbound business services. In particular, the Commission has found that competition for AT&T's business services is "thriving," that "advance scrutiny of most AT&T business service tariffs no longer appears necessary to protect the public interest," and that subjecting AT&T's

services to unnecessary regulatory requirements imposes substantial "direct and indirect costs" on consumers. 25 This is no less true with respect to AT&T's residential services, as AT&T has shown. 26 Accordingly, limiting the relief proposed in the Notice to AT&T's competitors would benefit only those competitors at the expense of consumers, and would be arbitrary and capricious.

CONCLUSION

For all of the reasons set forth above, and in AT&T's Comments, the Commission can and should allow all interexchange carriers to determine the form of their tariffs and file tariff revisions on one day's notice. The Commission's proposal to permit carriers to file only maximum rates or ranges of rates, with actual rates to be

²⁵ IXC Rulemaking Order, 6 FCC Rcd. at 5892, 5894, 5895 (1991). Contrary to the claims of some commenters (e.g., ALTS, pp. 2-3; CompTel, p. 8 n. 19, RCI, p. 2 n. 6), the court's statements in AT&T v. FCC regarding dominant carrier regulation (978 F.2d at 736) cannot reasonably be construed as approving the application of different rules to AT&T. The regulation of AT&T was not before the court, and the record therefore did not include the Commission's findings in the IXC Rulemaking Order cited in AT&T's comments in this proceeding, or any of the evidence presented by AT&T in Dockets 90-132 or 92-134 (Price Cap Performance Review for AT&T). In fact, the court cited an order in the Competitive Carrier Proceeding issued more than thirteen years ago to support its reference to AT&T as "dominant." 978 F.2d at 729, citing Competitive Carrier Proceeding, First Report and Order, 85 F.C.C.2d 1, 22-24, 27-30 (1980).

²⁶ Comments of AT&T, Price Cap Performance Review for AT&T, CC Docket No. 92-134, filed Sept. 4, 1992.

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determined pursuant to secret agreements, is patently unlawful and should not be adopted.

Respectfully Submitted,

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Bell Atlantic telephone companies ("Bell Atlantic")

BellSouth Telecommunications, Inc. ("BellSouth")

Capital Cities/ABC, Inc. and National Broadcasting Company, Inc. ("Networks")

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Competitive Telecommunications Association ("CompTel")

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I, Judy Middleton, do hereby certify that on this 19th day of April, 1993, a copy of the foregoing Reply Comments of American Telephone and Telegraph Company was mailed by U.S. first class mail, postage prepaid, to the parties listed below.

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